

# NeWFism and the Tradition

by

Alton C. Thompson

March 10, 2014

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## NeWFism and the Tradition

Because I introduced and described “NeWFism” in my [Addressing Our Uncertain Future](#) (see pp.41 – 77 in that eBook),<sup>1</sup> I will not repeat myself here—except to say that (a) NeWFism is centered on an *institution* (the New Word Fellowship), that institution being (b) religious—or at least *quasi*-religious—in nature. I make the latter suggestion given that—contrary to what most people likely think of when they think of “religion”—NeWFism does not involve a *belief system*, nor even an “umbrella” *organization*. That is, although NeWFism can be considered to be a religion, it differs in important respects from what most in the Western world (the United States in particular) think of when they think about “religion.”

This point needs emphasis: A *given* person may think of NeWFism as a religion, but there is no inherent *need* so to perceive NeWFism—for NeWFism is based on a set of *procedures*, and *not* on a set of *beliefs*. Thus, people with different belief systems—religious or otherwise—can become NeWFians without fear that their belief system will be threatened—unless one finds the mere *exposure* to belief systems other than one’s own threatening! I will grant that the exposure to other belief systems, because it can involve a *broadening* of one’s horizons, *can* have the effect of *changing* one’s own belief system. But the “rules” associated with NeWFism do not allow proselitization, nor even allow participants to insist that *others* accept one’s own beliefs.

Rather, NeWFism provides all participants with a “comfort zone”—a “safe house”—in which they can feel free to *express* their views without fear of being criticized—*directly*, at any rate—by others in the group, while simultaneously providing them with an opportunity to hear views expressed that differ from their own. Thus, NeWFism will be attractive *only* to those who *welcome* the opportunities that it provides. I wish that *everyone* had a mindset such that *everyone* would be attracted to NeWFism—but know full well that that is not the case!

So far NeWFism exists only “on paper”—i.e., as an *idea*, or set of ideas. My hope, however, is that it gains “converts,” and that NeWFian Fellowships become a reality in the near future. To help that process along, I take this opportunity to argue that although NeWFism would be a new phenomenon to emerge on the scene, it would do so *not* as something lacking predecessors but, rather, as a new religion (or not!) that can be thought of as (a) *part* of a long Tradition, and one that (b) *further*s—i.e., *extends*—that Tradition. One that—I would add—does so in a fashion

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<sup>1</sup> The motivation that led me to write that eBook is the same one that motivated me to write this essay—a concern with the human (and non-human as well) future, given the threat being posed to our continued existence by global warming. As one who was raised in Christianity, and therefore exposed to the (Christian) Bible, I therefore find it of interest that Thomas L. Thompson (not a relative) has stated ([The Mythic Past: Biblical Archaeology and the Myth of Israel](#), 1999, p. 31) that “The Bible might well be described as a survival literature, if you will.” (!)

that is highly *appropriate* given our current situation as humans—in particular, the fact that we are currently faced with the threat of global warming (a fact regarding which I have written extensively in my essays for the [www.bravenewworld.in](http://www.bravenewworld.in) web site).

Religion *per se* is, of course, a world-wide phenomenon, and as such consists of a *number* of different traditions. The word “the” in my title is, then, somewhat misleading. Given this, I need to make clear at the outset that the Tradition to which I am referring *specifically* is the particular tradition to which I, personally, have been exposed—that of Christianity. Given that fact, it should not be surprising that I have been “authored” by the Christian Bible, as Delwin Brown would put it,<sup>2</sup> and that that book plays a prominent role in the presentation that follows.

I need to add immediately, however, that although I have been associated with Christianity all of my life, I do not perceive the Tradition in question here as a *Christian* one. It would be somewhat more accurate to refer to the Tradition as a *Biblical* one, given that the (Christian) Bible contains a great deal of Tradition material. However, I perceive the Tradition in a *deeper* sense, as *underlying* the Bible, being more fundamental (!) than the Bible. I see the Tradition as (a) having its origins long *before* the books of the “Old Testament” came into existence, even long before the *resources* upon which it was based came into existence; as (b) having (probably) existed in other parts of the (Western) world during “Bible times;” and as (c) having continued in the West *after* Bible times, (d) down to the present.

In asserting that the Tradition is more *fundamental* than Christianity, I mean in part that its focus is on *ideas* rather than *personalities*, which fact suggests that it does not attribute some special (e.g., “divine”) status to any given “participant” in the Tradition. Indeed, from a *Tradition* standpoint, Christianity has been but a *tangential* part of the Tradition—more a *deviant strand* of the Tradition than a genuine part of it! Given that I was raised in Christianity, and have always been associated with it, it has not been easy for me to (a) recognize the existence of the Tradition, or to (b) recognize Christianity—in its varying forms—as a deviant development relative to the Tradition; as, that is, being schizophrenic in being simultaneously partly *in*, and partly *antithetical to* (!), the Tradition. Some strands of Christianity have been more “Traditional” than other strands, of course; but *none* of them has been “sufficiently” Traditional, in my opinion.

The above statements suggest a number of questions, among them:

1. What is the *nature* of the Tradition—i.e., what has it been “about”? I prefer to perceive the Tradition as *purposive*; therefore, I would rephrase this question to read: What *objective(s)* can be associated with the Tradition?
2. Given that way of perceiving the Tradition, a question that “naturally” follows is: What *means* have been suggested/used for achieving those objectives?

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<sup>2</sup> See [his article](#) with that title.

3. Which question leads, quite “naturally” again, to the question: How *effective* have those means been?

Also, regarding the objective(s) associated with the Tradition, there are such questions as:

1. What has been the *source(s)* of those objectives—i.e., where did they come from?
2. What *changes* have occurred in the Tradition’s objectives over time?
3. I have claimed that NeWFism is not only a *part* of the Tradition, but is likely to *extend* the Tradition, if it comes into existence. Not only to extend/further it, but do so in a way particularly *relevant* for today. Can I “back up” this claim in a way so that those individuals who would *identify* with the Tradition would want to *become* NeWFians? To either abandon their *existing* Christian denomination—or even *another religion* entirely—for NeWFism, or abandon their *non-religious stance* for NeWFism?

In the pages that follow I hope to answer the above questions satisfactorily, so that some will be attracted enough to NeWFism *as an idea* that they will *want* to make it a reality—and will then *do* so!

## I. The Tradition: It’s Nature

In trying to describe the *nature* of the Tradition, it might be useful to begin by referring to people who were clearly *not* a part of the Tradition. I will take just two examples here, the first being Isaac Harris and Max Blanck—who played a major role in the 146 deaths caused in the [Triangle fire](#):

It was a profitable business in a modern fireproof building heralded as a model of efficiency. Yet the Triangle Shirtwaist factory [owned by Harris and Blanck] in New York City became the deadliest workplace in American history when fire broke out on the premises on March 25, 1911. Within about 15 minutes the blaze killed 146 workers—most of them immigrant Jewish and Italian women in their teens and early 20s. Though most workers on the eighth and 10th floors escaped, those on the ninth floor were trapped behind a locked exit door. As the inferno spread, the trapped workers either burned to death inside the building or jumped to their deaths on the sidewalk below.

Harris and Blanck—who themselves had immigrated to the United States from Russia in the 1890s—both got involved in the garment industry upon their arrival here, and in 1900 together formed the Triangle Waist Company in New York City, and started manufacturing “[shirtwaists](#).” The people they hired to do the work were primarily young immigrant females, who were forced to work long hours under strict working conditions for little pay—classic [Marxian exploitation](#)! Because Harris and Blanck feared thievery on the part of their employees, they had all exits

locked except one—so that when a fire started in the building in 1911, the employees on the ninth floor were trapped, with most dying in one way or another.

As the [fire](#) “progressed”:

A large crowd of bystanders gathered on the street, witnessing 62 people jumping or falling to their deaths from the burning building.<sup>[23]</sup> [Louis Waldman](#), later a New York Socialist state assemblyman, described the scene years later:<sup>[24]</sup>

One Saturday afternoon in March of that year—March 25, to be precise—I was sitting at one of the reading tables in the old Astor Library... It was a raw, unpleasant day and the comfortable reading room seemed a delightful place to spend the remaining few hours until the library closed. I was deeply engrossed in my book when I became aware of fire engines racing past the building. By this time I was sufficiently Americanized to be fascinated by the sound of fire engines. Along with several others in the library, I ran out to see what was happening, and followed crowds of people to the scene of the fire.

A few blocks away, the Asch Building at the corner of Washington Place and Greene Street was ablaze. When we arrived at the scene, the police had thrown up a cordon around the area and the firemen were helplessly fighting the blaze. The eighth, ninth, and tenth stories of the building were now an enormous roaring cornice of flames.

Word had spread through the East Side, by some magic of terror, that the plant of the Triangle Waist Company was on fire and that several hundred workers were trapped. Horrified and helpless, the crowds—I among them—looked up at the burning building, saw girl after girl appear at the reddened windows, pause for a terrified moment, and then leap to the pavement below, to land as mangled, bloody pulp. This went on for what seemed a ghastly eternity. Occasionally a girl who had hesitated too long was licked by pursuing flames and, screaming with clothing and hair ablaze, plunged like a living torch to the street. Life nets held by the firemen were torn by the impact of the falling bodies.

The emotions of the crowd were indescribable. Women were hysterical, scores fainted; men wept as, in paroxysms of frenzy, they hurled themselves against the police lines.

As to consequences:

The company's owners, Max Blanck and Isaac Harris, who survived the fire by fleeing to the building's roof when the fire began, were indicted on charges of first- and second-degree [manslaughter](#) in mid-April; the pair's trial began on December 4, 1911.<sup>[39]</sup> [Max Steuer](#), counsel for the defendants, managed to destroy the credibility of one of the survivors, Kate Alterman, by asking her to repeat her testimony a number of times, which she did without altering key phrases. Steuer argued to the jury that Alterman and possibly other witnesses had memorized their statements, and might even have been told what to say by the prosecutors. The prosecution charged that the owners knew the exit doors were locked at the time in question. The investigation found that the locks were intended to be locked during working hours based on the findings from the fire,<sup>[40]</sup> but the defense stressed that the prosecution failed to prove

that the owners knew that. The jury acquitted the two men, but they lost a subsequent civil suit in 1913 in which plaintiffs won compensation in the amount of \$75 per deceased victim. The insurance company paid Blanck and Harris about \$60,000 more than the reported losses, or about \$400 per casualty. In 1913, Blanck was once again arrested for locking the door in his factory during working hours. He was fined \$20.<sup>[41]</sup>

One could very well argue that the real culprit here was the *economic* system within which these various parties lived—a system that forced the two entrepreneurs to treat their employers badly to be able to survive in the “[dog eat dog](#)” world they lived in; and a *societal* system whose “justice” system placed more value on private property than human life. But a potential entrepreneur in such a system has a choice: Either choose to engage in an economic activity in which one can treat employees as if they are fellow humans—and perhaps not be overly successful from an economic standpoint—or choose, rather, to engage in an economic activity in which one must mistreat employees in order to survive. Granted that that’s not much of a choice for an economic system to offer potential entrepreneurs! But it *is* a real choice—a fact, however, that the prevailing intellectual atmosphere may make difficult for one to recognize.

Thus, I agree with the argument that the economic system within which one “operates” places significant restrictions on what one can, and cannot, do—this being especially true for those who because of abilities, education, etc., have little choice other than to seek work as an employee. But those who are “[job creators](#)” *do* have choices, and Harris and Blanck, living as they did during the “[Gilded Age](#)” of our history, demonstrated through their actions—as did numerous others during that period—that they were *not* a part of the Tradition. Louis Waldman (quoted above) showed, however, through his reactions to the fire that he was (probably) a Tradition person.

A second example is provided by Jeremiah Goulka, author of the recent “[Why I Left the GOP](#) [i.e., the Republican Party].” (For “GOP” see [this](#); Ripon, Wisconsin, claims—and is evidently *proud* of this claim!—to be the [birthplace](#) of this party, with the [Ripon Society](#) based on that claim.)

Goulka says of himself:

I grew up in a rich, white suburb north of Chicago [Illinois] populated by moderate, business-oriented Republicans. Once upon a time, we would have been called Rockefeller Republicans. Today we would be called liberal Republicans or slurred by the Right as “Republicans In Name Only” (RINOs).

We believed in competition and the free market, in bootstraps and personal responsibility, in equality of opportunity, not outcomes. We were financial conservatives who wanted less government. We believed in *noblesse oblige*, for we saw ourselves as part of a natural aristocracy, even if we hadn’t been born into it. We sided with management over labor and saw

unions as a scourge. We hated racism and loved Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., particularly his dream that his children would “live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.” We worried about the rise of the Religious Right and its social-conservative litmus tests. We were tough on crime, tough on national enemies. We believed in business, full stop.

Thus, Goulka grew up as a person who was anything but a “Traditionist.” He may have attended a church (the article doesn’t say one way or another), but if he did, either the church failed to challenge him on the basis of the Jesus of the gospels, or it did, but he paid no attention, being a church member for *social* rather than *religious* reasons.

Goulka did not stay “outside,” however. His attitudes began to change when he began working for the Justice Department:

My office was tasked with opposing petitions for *habeas corpus* brought by Guantánamo detainees who claimed that they were being held indefinitely without charge. The government’s position struck me as an abdication of a core Republican value: protecting the “procedural” rights found in the Bill of Rights. Sure, *habeas corpus* had been waived in wartime before, but it seemed to me that waiving it here reduced us to the terrorists’ level. Besides, since acts of terrorism were crimes, why not prosecute them? I refused to work on those cases.

When Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans, FEMA requested that federal employees help as volunteers in their efforts, and Goulka took advantage of that opportunity:

Soon, I was involved with a task force trying to rebuild (and reform) the city’s criminal justice system. Growing up hating racism, I was appalled but not very surprised to find overt racism and the obvious use of racist code words by officials in the Deep South.

Then something tiny happened that pried open my eyes to the less obvious forms of racism and the hurdles the poor face when they try to climb the economic ladder. It happened on an official visit to a school in a suburb of New Orleans that served kids who had gotten kicked out of every other school around. I was investigating what types of services were available to the young people who were showing up in juvenile hall and seemed to be headed toward the proverbial life of crime.

My tour guide mentioned that parents were required to participate in some school programs. One of these was a field trip to a sit-down restaurant.

This stopped me in my tracks. I thought: What kind of a lame field trip is that?

It turned out that none of the families had ever been to a sit-down restaurant before. The teachers had to instruct parents and students alike how to order off a menu, how to calculate the tip.

I was stunned.

This began a learning experience on his part, one that resulted in a definite “change of heart”—and somewhat of an entry into the Tradition. Proving that “conversion” is possible—as was the case with Scrooge in [Charles Dickens’s \*A Christmas Carol\*](#) and [Bill Murray in \*Groundhog Day\*](#).

How, then, should one characterize the Tradition? It can be characterized using different groups of words, but my preference—at the moment, at least—is to think of the Tradition in rather simple terms<sup>3</sup>—to think that what the Tradition is “about” is answering Cain’s question to God—“[Am I my brother’s keeper?](#)”—with a resounding “Yes!”<sup>4</sup> I should perhaps add that I made this decision before learning of the recent [governmental effort](#) to provide a “helping hand for young men of color.”

This is a simple description of the nature of the Tradition, and there is a certain virtue in being able to state that nature in such a succinct manner. However, the problem with such a simple definition is that it is subject to varying *interpretations*. That is, one person, in “operationalizing” the definition as that person believes, honestly, that it should be operationalized is likely to arrive at an “answer” that differs—and perhaps even *substantially*—from the answer of another person who, likewise, has made an honest effort to operationalize the definition. Thus, as I present my comments on the Tradition on the following pages, I necessarily present it through *my own* lens—meaning that others who might set the *same* task before themselves would provide *different* answers.

Thus, in offering comments on the Tradition I recognize that my views are just one of many possible ones on this subject; I therefore offer them not as “definitive” ones but only as *my* views. My objective here, after all, is not to “convert” all readers to my way of thinking. Rather, it is to provide “background material” for NeWFism, with the hope that this will help at least some readers reach the conclusion that they should become NeWFians, and that they then try to convert others, and with others form a NeWFian Fellowship.

## II. Means Advocated/Used by Tradition Members

I would like to preface my remarks for this section by noting that one can *belong* to a tradition without being *conscious* of that fact. Obviously, the *initiators* of a tradition are not conscious of themselves as initiators of a tradition—their interest being attending to certain issues (etc.) existing in their time. *Other* individuals may then arrive later who have been influenced

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<sup>3</sup> Alluding here to my recent “[Keep it Simple, Baby!](#)”

<sup>4</sup> Thomas L. Thompson (*op. cit.*, pp. 54, 237 ff., 274) has referred, similarly, to the Bible’s theology as being one of “the way.” He expands on this claim by saying (p. 241): “The way of Yahweh is the path of the spirit, of joy, of innocence, piety and wisdom, of righteousness, peace and goodness, truth, holiness, humility and life, the way of Zion.” And adds: “God’s way is precisely the way of the spirit and of philosophy.” And: The way “is a sectarian, and implicitly fanatic, demand for decision and choice. One is either for or against God: for or against the tradition.”



unawares by the thinking/actions of certain predecessors—those other individuals thereby (perhaps) initiating, again unawares, a tradition.

A tradition can go on for a long time in this way—i.e., lacking *self-awareness* as a tradition—and there’s nothing inherently objectionable about that—so long, that is, as the tradition is a *commendable* one. There are, however, at least two problems associated with such a situation:

- Strands may develop which *claim* affinity with a given tradition, but which develop in a deviant manner relative to the tradition in question. Such a claim is strongest if those who initiate the new strand *had* clearly been a part of the given tradition earlier. By *retaining* certain key elements of the tradition they may give the *impression* of being part of the tradition, but those elements may be *tangential* to the tradition, with the *basics* of the new strand being of a deviant nature.
- Conversely, members of a tradition may tend to conceive the tradition so *narrowly* that when a new strand appears on the scene that *is* actually in the tradition (as judged by an “objective” outside observer), that new strand may not be *recognized* as such by those in the tradition. Because of this reaction, they therefore not only do not *embrace* the new strand, but *reject* it as “foreign,” “subversive,” etc.—and may *persecute* the new strand’s members out of existence.

For example, I argue later in this essay that the “God” concept was an integral part of the Tradition in the early years of the Tradition, and that although the Fourierism (after [Charles Fourier](#)) that developed much later was definitely a *part* of the Tradition, many—perhaps most—fail to recognize that fact. One reason for this failure (but not the only one) is that although the early Hebrews had a number of different concepts of God (a fact brought out by [Jack Miles](#)), [Fourier’s concept of God](#) differed from any of those concepts—and would have been regarded as strange, even blasphemous, by the early Hebrews.

From my perspective on the Tradition, the “God” concept is not a *necessary* part of the Tradition—its continuing presence in the Tradition being explained by the fact that in the early years that concept functioned in an *explanatory* manner, but that in later years (*much* later years, I would add) *alternate* explanations were offered—a matter to which I will be giving attention in a later section (Section IV).

It is especially *Christians*—many/most of whom are only *tangentially* a part of the Tradition!—who have a fixation on the idea that some concept of “God” *must* be a part of the Tradition. What’s strange about that claim is not only that many/most such people tend to be marginal “Traditionists,” but the “God” that they *actually* tend to worship is

“free-market” ideology, a [subtle form of racism](#), etc.!—a fact that they are able to *disguise* from most others.

It is, then, advantageous to make the nature of the Tradition *explicit*, for this enables it to be open to *liberal attitudes* (by which I mean *flexible* thinking that is aware of what is going on around oneself, and what responses might therefore be advisable) and new, creative ideas. The emergence of such qualities may prove to be essential to the very survival of our species—assuming, that is, that it will be *possible* to survive the ravages that global warming will be inflicting on us within the next few decades, if not years.

With these prefatory remarks now out of the way, and having already asserted that what the Tradition has been “about,” in brief, is “being one’s brother’s keeper,” we can proceed to the question of what *means* have been suggested/implemented over the years for achieving this goal. As my intention here is to write an essay rather than a book, no attempt is made here to provide a *definitive* discussion. Rather, my intent is to discuss those developments (a) of which I am aware (!) that (b) I regard of importance.

Given that I perceive the first evidence for the Tradition as having been presented in the (Christian) Bible, I begin with evidence presented in the “[Old Testament](#)”—what Jews refer to as the [Tanakh](#). Considerably more space is devoted below to the Bible as a source compared with other sources because (a) that’s where the Tradition has its roots, in my opinion, and (b) because NeWFism itself—the new religion (again, or not!) being promoted herein—reflects my exposure to the Bible more than any other influence. In a sense, then, the discussion in this section is imbalanced, but my opinion on the matter is that the balance is *just right*, given that my intended audience is (primarily, but not exclusively) those who, like myself, were raised in Christianity.

Although the Old Testament begins as a book that seems to be presenting an historical account of our *species*, the fact that the presentation quickly becomes a discussion primarily of the “history” of the early *Hebrews* in itself should make one suspicious of its historical value. Needless to say, in the discussion that follows I do not perceive the “historical” part of the Bible as conveying historical truths.<sup>5</sup> Rather, I use the Bible—the “Old Testament” in particular—as a source for Tradition *ideas*.

In “mining” the Old Testament for information specifically about *means* relative to the Tradition, my desire is to use both a *genetic* and *generic* approach, with an attempt to “begin at the beginning.” That beginning does not, however, begin with the story of creation but, rather,

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<sup>5</sup> In fact, Thomas L. Thompson (*op. cit.*, p. 189) would add that “The Bible isn’t interested in telling us anything about the past.[!] It is using old traditions about the past as parables.”

with—and I follow [Julius Wellhausen](#) here—with the *prophets*. Wellhausen is not only famous for originating the “[documentary hypothesis](#),” (which the “[creationists](#)” claim to have [debunked](#)) but for arguing—regarding the question of which came first, the Law or the Prophets—that the [prophets came first](#).

## A. Exhortation as a Means

Although the term “prophet” may seem to suggest that what the prophets were “about” was predicting future events, in actuality their *primary* concern was with *exhorting*—encouraging certain actions. Where the future entered their pronouncements was in warnings that *if* certain actions were not undertaken, *then* certain negative consequences were likely to occur in the near future. A brief summary of what the prophets were “about” is [this one](#): “Prophecy arose in Israel at the same time as kingship, and it went away when Israel ceased to be an independent state. This is no coincidence. We will see that the prophets interacted extensively with Israel’s kings. Although the prophets may have been quite pious and spiritual, they were not monks or ascetics. They were fully engaged.” I would qualify this only by saying that the prophets *featured* in the Bible all “interacted with Israel’s kings” in an *adversarial* manner, and that they were critical not only of the king, but the rich—and the religion of their time. That is, they were *anti-religious*! (Note that in referring below to named/unnamed individuals, I am referring to *characters in the Bible*, not necessarily to *actual people*.)

Amos, for example, said this of rich women ([Amos 4:1 – 3](#)):

<sup>1</sup>Listen to this, you fat cows of Bashan who are on the mountain of Samaria. You make it hard for the poor. You crush those in need. You say to your husbands, “Bring us something to drink!”

<sup>2</sup>As the Lord God is holy, He has promised, “The days are coming when they will take you away with meat hooks. And the last of you will be taken with fish hooks. <sup>3</sup>You will go out through breaks in the walls. Each of you will go straight out. And you will be sent to Harmon,” says the Lord.

And in the following famous passage ([Amos 5: 21 – 24](#)), Amos criticized the *religion* of his time, and emphasized that what *true* religion entailed was being just and righteous—i.e., being one’s brother’s keeper:

<sup>21</sup> “I hate, I despise your religious festivals;  
your assemblies are a stench to me.

<sup>22</sup> Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings,  
I will not accept them.

Though you bring choice fellowship offerings,  
I will have no regard for them.

<sup>23</sup> Away with the noise of your songs!

I will not listen to the music of your harps.  
<sup>24</sup> But let justice roll on like a river,  
righteousness like a never-failing stream!

Hosea is of interest not only because he was critical of what was going on in Israel in his time, but suggested that this had *environmental* implications ([Hosea 4:1 – 3](#)). Note also that Hosea's interest in economic exploitation was more implicit than explicit, his focus being on what might be called "moral" matters; thus, his interpretation of being one's brother's keeper had an orientation that differed somewhat from that of Amos.

<sup>1</sup> Hear the word of the LORD, you Israelites,  
because the LORD has a charge to bring  
against you who live in the land:  
"There is no faithfulness, no love,  
no acknowledgment of God in the land.  
<sup>2</sup> There is only cursing, <sup>[a]</sup> lying and murder,  
stealing and adultery;  
they break all bounds,  
and bloodshed follows bloodshed.  
<sup>3</sup> Because of this the land dries up,  
and all who live in it waste away;  
the beasts of the field, the birds in the sky  
and the fish in the sea are swept away.

In a later brief passage ([Hosea 6:6](#)), however, Hosea not only brought in the economic element, but was critical of the religion of his time. Speaking for God, Hosea said:

For I desire mercy, not sacrifice,  
and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.

Micah was perhaps the most critical of all the prophets, and much of his ire was aimed at the society's *leaders*, such as in [Micah 3:3](#) (where he is presented as speaking on God's behalf):

Then I said,

"Listen, you leaders of Jacob,  
you rulers of Israel.  
Should you not embrace justice,  
<sup>2</sup> you who hate good and love evil;  
who tear the skin from my people  
and the flesh from their bones;  
<sup>3</sup> who eat my people's flesh,  
strip off their skin

and break their bones in pieces;  
who chop them up like meat for the pan,  
like flesh for the pot?”

And, like the other prophets, Micah was critical of the religion of his time ([Micah 6:6 – 8](#)), beginning this passage with a series of rhetorical questions, and closing with some famous words:

<sup>6</sup> With what shall I come before the LORD  
and bow down before the exalted God?  
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,  
with calves a year old?  
<sup>7</sup> Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,  
with ten thousand rivers of olive oil?  
Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression,  
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?  
<sup>8</sup> He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.  
And what does the LORD require of you?  
To act justly and to love mercy  
and to walk humbly<sup>[a]</sup> with your God.

First Isaiah (the book of Isaiah is believed to comprise the writings of three different individuals) is the final prophet that I will quote here ([Isaiah 1:10 – 17](#)):

<sup>10</sup> Hear the word of the LORD,  
you rulers of Sodom;  
listen to the instruction of our God,  
you people of Gomorrah!  
<sup>11</sup> “The multitude of your sacrifices—  
what are they to me?” says the LORD.  
“I have more than enough of burnt offerings,  
of rams and the fat of fattened animals;  
I have no pleasure  
in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats.  
<sup>12</sup> When you come to appear before me,  
who has asked this of you,  
this trampling of my courts?  
<sup>13</sup> Stop bringing meaningless offerings!  
Your incense is detestable to me.  
New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations—  
I cannot bear your worthless assemblies.  
<sup>14</sup> Your New Moon feasts and your appointed festivals  
I hate with all my being.  
They have become a burden to me;  
I am weary of bearing them.  
<sup>15</sup> When you spread out your hands in prayer,  
I hide my eyes from you;

even when you offer many prayers,  
I am not listening.

Your hands are full of blood!

<sup>16</sup> Wash and make yourselves clean.  
Take your evil deeds out of my sight;  
stop doing wrong.

<sup>17</sup> Learn to do right; seek justice.  
Defend the oppressed.<sup>[a]</sup>  
Take up the cause of the fatherless;  
plead the case of the widow.

Again, the focus here is on economic exploitation, with condemnation of the religion of the time for having the wrong orientation.

What the modern reader of the prophets tends not to realize is that the prophets, in being critical of the religion of their time, were *anti-religious* (!)—and would have been so perceived by many of their fellow Hebrews. However, it was *they*—in the sense of the *writings* attributed to them—who were the *initiators* of the Tradition given attention in this essay. Many Christians of today might be expected to criticize NeWFism as being anti-religious, but in doing so they would place *themselves* in the position of those who the prophets of old criticized as being unreligious! **Is it any wonder that I refer to Christianity as a *deviant* strand with only *roots* in the Tradition?!**

A passage in the Old Testament that is not from one of the prophets' books, but whose content greatly resembles what the prophets "preached," is this beautiful passage from Job 12:17:

<sup>12</sup> Because I delivered the poor who cried for help,  
And the orphan who had no helper.

<sup>13</sup> "The blessing of the one ready to perish came upon me,  
And I made the widow's heart sing for joy.

<sup>14</sup> "I put on righteousness, and it clothed me;  
My justice was like a robe and a turban.

<sup>15</sup> "I was eyes to the blind  
And feet to the lame.

<sup>16</sup> "I was a father to the needy,  
And I investigated the case which I did not know.

<sup>17</sup> "I broke the jaws of the wicked  
And snatched the prey from his teeth

In this passage criticism of those who exploit is left *implicit*, the emphasis being on how being one's brother's keeper might be interpreted; this is a truly powerful passage!

Given that the first means that I am discussing here is that of *exhortation*, and that I am using the Christian Bible as my source, I must skip ahead chronologically briefly and note that Jesus (as, that is, presented in the canonical gospels) was like the prophets in using the exhortation means, but is most notable for doing so using the *parable* as his vehicle—perhaps to avoid charges of blasphemy by the Jewish leaders of the time. There is, for example, his famous parable of the Good Samaritan ([Luke 10:25 – 35](#)):

<sup>25</sup> On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

<sup>26</sup> “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”

<sup>27</sup> He answered, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’<sup>[a]</sup>; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’<sup>[b]</sup>”

<sup>28</sup> “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”

<sup>29</sup> But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

<sup>30</sup> In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. <sup>31</sup> A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. <sup>32</sup> So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. <sup>33</sup> But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. <sup>34</sup> He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. <sup>35</sup> The next day he took out two denarii<sup>[c]</sup> and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’

<sup>36</sup> “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

<sup>37</sup> The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.”

Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

Note here, first, that the word “neighbor” is given an unconventional—and interesting!—meaning: A “neighbor” is not one who *lives near* you; rather, it is one who you *treat* as a *brother*, given the truism that you *are* your brother’s keeper. Second, following the Law is what’s involved in being *religious*, doing so indicating that you love God, given that the Law *came* from God. Third, the fact that *another’s* cultic practices differ from one’s own does not disqualify the other from being religious—the actions of the Samaritan proving that point: One’s “neighbor” is the one who one treats as a brother, and what *qualifies* such a person as a potential

brother is the mere fact that s/he is a *fellow human*, that's *all* that matters!<sup>6</sup> Fourth, the story, by making the priest and Levite its "villains" criticizes the "blame the victim" nature of the religion of the time, but does so in an indirect way—a way calculated (one would like to think!) in a way most likely to bring about "conversion" of the "expert in the law" in question.

Another passage attributed to Jesus (in [Matthew 25:31 – 45](#)) is memorable not because it involves parable-telling, or even explicit exhortation, but, rather, because it gains its power via *repetition* (compare this passage with, e.g., [Isaiah 58:6 – 10](#)):

<sup>31</sup> "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. <sup>32</sup> All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. <sup>33</sup> He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

<sup>34</sup> "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. <sup>35</sup> For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, <sup>36</sup> I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

<sup>37</sup> "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? <sup>38</sup> When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? <sup>39</sup> When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

<sup>40</sup> "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

<sup>41</sup> "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. <sup>42</sup> For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, <sup>43</sup> I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.'

<sup>44</sup> "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?'

<sup>45</sup> "He will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.'

What's of interest about this passage is that brotherly behavior is enjoined, and done so in a story format. Thus, although *direct* exhortation is attributed to Jesus at various places in the (canonical) gospels—the [Beatitudes](#) being a famous example—somewhat in the manner of the

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<sup>6</sup> I would expand "neighbor" to include *all* of "creation"—if for no other reason that we humans are dependent on the rest of creation for our *very survival*!



prophets of earlier times, much of the exhortation attributed to Jesus in the gospels is of an *indirect* nature, the John 9 passage being an example, but the *parable* being the most famous example.

Given that the theme of this section is *means* used to cause people to treat others as one's brother, and that my intention here is not to write a book, I will say nothing further here about Jesus (or Paul, James, etc.) and proceed to a second means, laws.

## **B. Establishing Laws as a Means**

As I stated earlier, I agree with those scholars who argue that it was the prophets—individuals whose primary activity was to engage in *exhortations*—who were, in a sense, the “founders” of Judaism—although they themselves did no founding, and the religion that developed in consequence of their exhortations, became, like the Christianity that developed later, only tangentially related to the Tradition. What *did* develop, however, as a consequence of prophetic “preaching” was a body of Law that, in its *positive* aspects at least, is truly amazing.

Below I offer a classification of laws, using the categories “ameliorative” and “restorative” as my basic categories. The “ameliorative” laws are ones that are oriented to existing situations; “restorative” ones, in contrast, have as their intention the restoration of a previously-existing situation. The actions demanded of commands can be either direct or indirect, and also may be either *injunctions*—i.e., commands to *do* something—or *prohibitions*—i.e., commands to *not* do something. Finally, commands can be thought of as varying in their degree of specificity—although it is not always easy to decide *where*, on the specific-abstract continuum, one should place a given command.)

I first present my classification, and then offer examples of each:

## I. Ameliorative

### A. Direct

1. Injunctions
  - a. Abstract
  - b. Specific
2. Prohibitions
  - a. Abstract
  - b. Specific

### B. Indirect (all of which are specific)

1. Injunctions
2. Prohibitions

## II. Restorative

### A. Abstract

### B. Specific.

Let us next, then, identify specific laws under the above headings:

### 1. Abstract Direct Ameliorative Injunctions

- a. Exodus 21:9 - If a man buys a female slave for his son, he is to treat her like a daughter. (From our perspective today this is an abstract injunction, but in the context of ancient Hebrew society—a “[high context](#)” [society](#)—would not have been.)
- b. Leviticus 19:18 – Don’t take revenge, or hate; love your neighbor as you love yourself.
- c. Leviticus 19:32 - Respect the elderly (a law that perhaps would have had a more concrete meaning in ancient Israel than it has for us).
- d. Leviticus 25:35 - You must provide for a poor neighbor.
- e. Deuteronomy 5:16 - Respect your parents (also a law that perhaps would have had a more specific meaning for the ancient Hebrews).
- f. Deuteronomy 10:19 - Show love for foreigners—because *you* were once foreigners (i.e., [allegedly in captivity in Egypt](#); what *was* true, rather, is that [Egypt occupied Palestine](#) for a long period of time!).

2. Specific Direct Ameliorative Injunctions

- a. Exodus 21:10 - If a man takes a second wife, he must continue to give the first wife the same amount of food and clothing, and the same rights.
- b. Exodus 22:26 - If you take a cloak as a pledge, give it back in the evening (for I am merciful, God says in the next verse).
- c. Deuteronomy 15:7 - 9 - If a fellow Israelite is in need, don't be selfish; lend (don't give!) him as much as he needs.
- d. Deuteronomy 24:15 - Before sundown, pay the wages of those to whom you owe wages.

3. Abstract Direct Ameliorative Prohibitions

- a. Exodus 22:21 – Don't mistreat foreigners.
- b. Exodus 22:22 – Don't mistreat widows or orphans.
- c. Exodus 23:9 – Don't mistreat foreigners; you know how it *feels* to be one (again, a reference to the alleged earlier period of captivity in Egypt).
- d. Leviticus 19:33 – Don't mistreat foreigners, for you were once foreigners yourselves (but not in Egypt—and not until a much later point in their history).
- e. Leviticus 25:46 – Don't treat you fellow Israelites harshly.

4. Specific Direct Ameliorative Prohibitions

- a. Exodus 20:1 - 17 - The Ten Commandments. (Most of these can be considered as rather specific in nature: don't murder, commit adultery, steal, accuse others falsely, desire another man's house/wife/slaves, etc.)
- b. Exodus 21:20 – Don't kill a slave or you will be punished (*how* not being specified).
- c. Exodus 22:25 – Don't require interest in loaning to a poor man.
- d. Exodus 23:6 – Don't deny justice to a poor man (i.e., be even-handed).
- e. Leviticus 19:13 – Don't take advantage of (i.e., exploit) anyone, don't rob anyone, don't hold back anyone's wages.
- f. Leviticus 19:14 – Don't curse a deaf man, or cause a blind man to stumble (literally, one assumes).

- g. Leviticus 25:37 – Don’t charge a poor neighbor any interest; don’t make a profit from the food you sell him.
  - h. Deuteronomy 5:7 - 21 (The Ten Commandments are repeated here, in a version very close to the Exodus 20 version.)
  - i. Deuteronomy 23:19 - In loaning to a fellow Israelite, charge no interest.
5. Specific Indirect Ameliorative Injunctions (an interesting category!—in that there are more ethical laws in this category than in any other one)
- a. Exodus 16:23 - The seventh day is to be a day of rest, dedicated to the LORD. ([John Dominic Crossan](#) has made this brilliant comment regarding the significance of the “sabbath” day: “The sabbath day represents a temporary stay of inequality, a day of rest for everyone alike, for animals and humans, for slaves and owners, for children and adults. Why? Because that is how God sees the world. Sabbath rest sends all alike back to symbolic egalitarianism. It is a regular stay against the activity that engenders inequality on the other days of the week.”<sup>7</sup>)
  - b. Exodus 23:11 - On each seventh year let the land rest, but the poor may eat whatever grows on it during that year. (Note the environmental insight here.)
  - c. Leviticus 19:9, 10 - In harvesting, leave the grain at the edges of the field for the poor; and leave the grapes in the vineyard that were missed for the poor and foreigners. (This is the law of *gleaning*.<sup>8</sup>)
  - d. Leviticus 23:22 (the gleaning of grain is referred to again).
  - e. Leviticus 23:42 - During the Festival of Shelters everyone is to live in temporary shelters for seven days. (What Crossan says regarding the sabbath day—see above—would also seem to be applicable here in that some temporary leveling would be involved, and this might help to renew feelings of empathy on the part of “haves” relative to the “have nots,” and other needy people, in their midst. Such a conclusion is reinforced by the fact that the wording here for verses 42 and 43 is: “All the people of Israel shall live in shelters for seven days, so that your descendants may know that the LORD made the people live in simple shelters when he led them out of Egypt. He is the LORD your God.”)

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<sup>7</sup> [The Birth of Christianity](#), 1998, p. 189.

<sup>8</sup> Note the empathy implicit here: Allow the needy to maintain their sense of self-respect by giving them an opportunity to *acquire* food for themselves, rather than simply *giving* food to them—thereby making them feel that they are in debt to you. What insight into human psychology!

- f. Leviticus 25:4 - 6 - Let your land rest every seventh year. But even though it is not cultivated, it will provide food for you, your slaves, your hired men, foreigners, and domestic/wild animals (but not the poor?!). (Interesting in its environmental implications, as well as well-being ones—without, however, making explicit reference to the poor!)
  - g. Deuteronomy 5:12 - 14 - Observe the Sabbath; this includes foreigners in your midst, and slaves.
  - h. Deuteronomy 14:22 - 29 – (The law of the tithe—so often misrepresented, and utterly so, by the churches!) Each year take a tenth of your production and celebrate with it; however, on each *third* year the tithe is to go to (what we today would call “food pantries”) for Levites (who have no property), foreigners, orphans, and widows. (Note that this injunction is directed at *producers* only; in modern terms this might be interpreted to mean that it is directed at *employers*, but not their *employees*!)
  - i. Deuteronomy 23:24 - In walking on a path in someone’s vineyard you can eat grapes along the way, but are not permitted to take any away in a container. (Presumably this is directed at the poor, with the poor cautioned to not be greedy, however!)
  - j. Deuteronomy 23:25 - In walking on a path in someone’s grain field, you can eat the grain that you can pull off with your hands, but don’t cut any with a sickle (or carry any away in a container?) (Again, this is obviously directed at the poor.)
  - k. Deuteronomy 24:19 - 21 - After gathering your crops, leave what’s left for foreigners, widows, and orphans. The same for your olive orchards and grape vineyards. (The law of gleaning again.)
  - l. Deuteronomy 26:12 - Every third year give the tithe to the Levites, foreigners, orphans, and widows. (That is, that which is given voluntarily—but by order!—by producers is to be given to those non-producers in the society who are *non-producers* either for no fault of their own, or because they have jobs . . . of a cultic nature.)
6. Specific Indirect Ameliorative Prohibitions
- a. Leviticus 25:23 - Land cannot be permanently sold, because it belongs to God. (Attention real estate agents!)
7. Abstract Restorative Laws
- a. Leviticus 19:18 - Love your neighbor as yourself (a law that *could*, conceivably, be interpreted as suggesting that it should be followed not only in the *here-and-*

now, but in a fashion that *restores* a situation wherein neediness should not occur, or occur but rarely).

## 8. Specific Restorative Laws

- a. Exodus 21:2 - All Hebrew slaves are to be set free in the seventh year.
- b. Leviticus 25:10 - 12 - The fiftieth year (referred to as the Jubilee year) is to be set apart. All property that has been sold is to be restored to the original owner or his descendants; all slaves are to be returned to their families.
- c. Deuteronomy 15:1 - At the end of each seventh year, cancel the debts of all those who owe you money (except for foreigners, verse 3 adds!).

What's interesting about the ethical laws presented in the Pentateuch is not just the laws themselves (whose emphasis is being one's brother's keeper), but the *tactics* used by the writers to *motivate* people to follow those laws. For example, consider the following familiar—and beautiful—passage ([Deuteronomy 6:4 – 9](#)):

<sup>4</sup> Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. <sup>[a]</sup> <sup>5</sup> Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. <sup>6</sup> These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. <sup>7</sup> Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. <sup>8</sup> Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. <sup>9</sup> Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

The writer in this case is using what might be termed a “reminder” strategy, advising his fellows to do various things to remind him of the laws (*all* of them, not just the ethical ones)—in the hope that they will then *follow* the laws (i.e., commands that they have attributed to God). Imagine how the world would be today if the laws identified above—and modernized to fit today's world—were to be followed, all because the suggestions in the above passage were put into practice!

Those who created the laws identified above under a series of categories must have thought (rightly, being realists to a degree!) that the above suggestions would not be enough, so they introduced three *additional* tactics:

- Attempts to generate feelings of empathy for the needy in one's society.
- Promises for obedience.
- Threats for disobedience.

Let us briefly address each of these tactics in turn, for these, too, represent contributions to Tradition.

1. Feelings of Empathy

- a. The Hebrews are frequently reminded in the Pentateuch that they were slaves in Egypt, and that the LORD had delivered them from that slavery. For example, in Deuteronomy 24:21, 22 we find these words: “When you have gathered your grapes, do not go back over the vines a second time; the grapes that are left are for the foreigners, orphans, and widows. Never forget that you were slaves in Egypt; that is why I have given you this command.”

This reminder seems to have two functions. First, by reminding the Hebrews that they (or their ancestors) had been (supposedly) slaves, the expectation was that they would feel *empathy* for slaves and other “have nots.” In fact in Exodus 23:9, we find: “Do not mistreat a foreigner; you know how it *feels* to be a foreigner, because you were foreigners in Egypt.” (italics added) Second, by reminding the Hebrews that God had (allegedly) delivered them from slavery, an implicit contract (“[covenant](#)”) is being stated: “I have done for you (have delivered you from slavery), now it’s your turn to do for *me*—and what I want you to do is to *obey my laws*.”<sup>9</sup> The motive in bringing the concept of a contract in here was (evidently) to make the early Hebrews feel *obligated* to God: They should obey the commands not only because God *commanded* them so to do, but because they had an *obligation* so to do.

- b. Institution of the Sabbath day, by giving everyone (including animals) a day of rest, is an equalizer (if but temporary). Besides that, it gives “haves” a *time* to reflect on how they treat others relative to what God wants—so that they can resolve to do better during the upcoming week. (They may not actually have *done* so, but at least those who created these laws presumably *hoped* that they would.)
- c. The Festival of Booths is also not only a (temporary) leveler, but a period of time that brings “haves” and “have nots” *together*. This, along with the fact that it gives “haves” a fairly lengthy time to reflect on how they treat others (and virtually *forces* them so to do, given the near proximity of people in need), may cause “haves” to improve their

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<sup>9</sup> Perhaps this can be regarded as the initial version of the covenant concept. Preceding such a command, however, is, e.g., this one: “Do not spread lies about anyone, and when someone is on trial for life, speak out if your testimony can help him. I am the LORD.” (Leviticus 19:16) A covenant is a sort of contract between God and humans—but one written and imposed by God! In this case we simply have a command of God: “Do such and such simply because I am ordering you to do it.” A covenant involves both God and humans, with the earliest true covenant in the Bible taking the form, “I delivered you from slavery in Egypt, now it’s your turn to do something for me (i.e., obey the laws that I have given you). Later, the covenant took on a new form: “Do for me (i.e., follow my laws), and I will bless you (as a people).

relationships with their less fortunate fellows. I use the term “less fortunate” deliberately here because the Bible’s dominant perspective on societal position seems to be that if one is a “have not,” this is not because one is lazy, etc., but, rather, because one either is being exploited by a fellow Hebrew, or has simply had bad luck (e.g., in having been widowed or orphaned). Indeed, the Hebrew Scripture’s explanation for why poverty exists in a society seems to be: “Haves” are haves because they have been ignoring God’s laws! How different is the attitude in *our* society!—in which instead of blaming “*haves*” for the existence of poverty (neediness in general), we “blame the *victim*”—and do so *thoughtlessly* at that.

- c. The [Passover festival](#) might also be mentioned under the “empathy” heading, especially given that it is specifically a “remembrance” festival that commemorates God’s (alleged) deliverance of the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt. As one of the three “pilgrim festivals” the other two being [Sukkot](#) (Tabernacles) and [Shavuot](#) (Pentecost)—it would have resulted in people traveling to Jerusalem. Given that this would have resulted in contact with fellow Jews in other “economic” (and other neediness situations—e.g., the lame) circumstances, these three festivals may have been designed, in part, to induce feelings of empathy in the society’s “haves” for those less fortunate than themselves.

## 2. Promises for Obedience, Threats for Disobedience

There is a famous passage in Deuteronomy (11:26 - 28) that reads: “Today I [the LORD] am giving you the choice between a blessing and a curse—a blessing, if you obey the commands of the LORD your God that I am giving you today; but a curse, if you disobey these commands and turn away to worship other gods that you have never worshiped before.” What should be noticed in this passage is that the LORD is not addressing Hebrews as *individuals* but as a *collective*. In Jesus’s time the Law was being given an *individualistic* interpretation, but centuries earlier that was by no means the case: The Pentateuch has the Law being given to a *people*, and the blessings promised for obedience, and curses threatened for disobedience, are also directed at a *people*.

Thus, the *promises* given in Leviticus 26:3-6 are directed at the Hebrews as a *people*: “If you [as a people] live according to my laws and obey my commands, I will send you rain at the right time, so that the land will produce crops and the trees will bear fruit. Your crops will be so plentiful that you will still be harvesting grain when it is time to pick grapes, and you will still be picking grapes when it is time to plant grain. You will have all that you want to eat, and you can live in safety in your land. I will give you peace in your land, and you can sleep without being afraid of anyone. I will get rid of the dangerous animals in the land, and there will be no more war there.” Likewise, the *punishments* for disobedience are to be borne by the group, and are essentially the converse of the blessings for obedience. (See, e.g., the passage in Leviticus 26 that begins with verse 14.)

Note here the important point that although the ethical laws listed above are *implicitly* directed at the society’s “haves,” they are *explicitly* directed at the Hebrews as a *people*. Thus, the society’s “have nots” are not made to feel that they are somehow people of a lesser sort—so that again, *psychological considerations* were involved in how the laws were stated (even though the



*intentions* may have been different). (Unfortunately, this fact that the laws were *seemingly* directed at the Hebrews in general became misused; for as thinking, at a later point (e.g., in Jesus's time <sup>10</sup>), became more individualistic, "haves" began turning these laws, and specifically the covenant concept, on their head—a point given more attention shortly

Interestingly, although the *promises* in the Pentateuch for obedience to the Law are directed at the *group*, and not *individuals*, such is not the case regarding *punishments* for disobedience. Many such punishments are intended for *individuals* who violate certain specific laws. For example, a number of such cases are given in Exodus 20, including this one (v. 14): "If a man marries a woman and her mother, all three shall be burned to death because of the disgraceful thing they have done; such a thing must not be permitted among you." In cases where the violator is *not* condemned to death, there may be punishment combined with the offering of a sacrifice. This is not to say that all of the sacrifices (using that term generically) discussed in, e.g., Leviticus have the purpose of *atonement* for wrongful behavior (e.g., *fellowship* offerings are for a different purpose<sup>11</sup>), but the *principal* purpose of sacrifices appears to be atonement for sins committed—thereby helping to restore the harmony that had existed prior to the "tearing of the societal fabric" associated with law-breaking.

A few pages earlier I suggested that ethical laws (and specifically ones other than those in the Ten Commandments) are the "heart" of the Law. I have just completed a review of the ethical laws, but given that the Pentateuch contains many laws *other* than ethical ones, what is my basis for asserting that the *ethical* laws are the principal ones? What I would point to in response here is that in Deuteronomy 15:4, 5 we find: "Not one of your people will be poor if you obey him [God] and carefully observe everything that I [Moses] command you today." Note that we have a *promise* here, but it is one that is different from other promises in the Old Testament. It makes no reference to *blessings* that will be received by the Hebrews as a people if they obey God's commands, nor does it even appeal to self-interest on the part of the society's "haves." It doesn't even try to convince people to obey God's commands because it is *their turn* to do for God (God having done for them, by liberating them from their Egyptian captors). Nor even does it try to induce feelings of *empathy* for the poor in the society's "haves." A very unusual—and interesting—statement in Deuteronomy, then!

The "promise" here, note, is simply an off-hand—and ostensibly unimportant—commentary on what the *societal situation* will be like if God's laws are followed. Not just the ethical laws, mind you, but *all* of them. But take notice: The clear suggestion here is that *the writers of these*

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<sup>10</sup> The story of Jesus healing the man born blind in [John 9](#) illustrates this, in this statement: "As he went along, he [Jesus] saw a man blind from birth. <sup>2</sup> His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?'" The disciples are presented here as having absorbed the inverted version of the Law being promulgated in their time—the notion that "bad things happen to bad people—or to people whose *parents* were bad."

<sup>11</sup> Indeed, it seems to be generally true that *sacrifices* are for atoning for sins committed, *offerings* (a special type of sacrifice) serve some other purpose.

*five books had as their ultimate interest the restoration of a society within which (physical) neediness was absent.* John Dominic Crossan would have us believe (as I noted earlier) that these writers wanted the creation of a *radically egalitarian* society, but I see that claim as overstating the Bible writers' intentions. Rather, I believe that a more reasonable conclusion is that they wished to restore a situation within which *physical neediness* in its various forms would be absent. (They were, I might add, writing so as to give the *impression* that they were writing while the Hebrews were living in Palestine under the institution of kingship—which was not *actually* the case, however—a point not of interest for the present discussion, however.)

If a significant portion of the Old Testament Law was of the “brother’s keeper” variety, the unfortunate aspect of that body of Law was that it existed mainly “on paper” rather than as laws that were *enforced*. In fact, the “spirit” of the Law—its “*help* the victim” quality—became *inverted* over time, so that in Jesus’s time it was (as I noted above) of the “*blame* the victim” variety.

Another problem with laws as means, however, is that they may be retained and followed over time, but become *obsolete*. That is, as society changes over time, a *need* for new laws that “cover” newly-emerging “sins” arises, but that need is not necessarily *fulfilled*. This fact about laws was recognized a century ago by University of Wisconsin sociologist [Edward A. Ross](#) in his 1907 [Sin and Society: An Analysis of Latter-Day Iniquity](#).

Ross argued, for example that (pp. 3, 4)

sin changes its quality as society develops. Modern sin takes its character from the mutualism of our time. Under our present manner of living, how many of my vital interests I must intrust to others! This spread-out manner of life lays snares for the weak and opens doors to the wicked. Interdependence puts us, as it were, at one another’s mercy, and so ushers in a multitude of new forms of wrong-doing. The practice of mutualism has always worked this way. Most sin is preying, and every new social relations begets its cannibalism.

Ross added (p. 36) that “As society grows more complex, it can be harmed in more ways.” He then got to his main point (p.40):

Our social organization has developed to a stage where the old righteousness is not enough. We need an annual supplement to the Decalogue [i.e., the Ten Commandments].

Ross’s belief, then, was—as had been the case with many before him—that because society changes, and new ways of harming one’s brother therefore arise continually, it is necessary to (a) *identify* the hurtful actions that are emerging, (b) *pass laws* making those actions illegal, and then (c) *enforce* those laws. This approach to getting “good”—non-hurtful—behavior on a society-wide basis has several problems, however:

- The fact that it is possible to *identify* hurtful actions is no guarantee that it will be possible to *pass laws* making such actions illegal.

- Even if such laws get passed, proper *enforcement* of those laws may not occur; for example, laws may be [enforced more vigorously against black youths](#) than white youths—for the same crimes.
- Those in control of the society may [get laws passed that benefit them](#) at the expense of “ordinary” people, having the laws written in such a complex manner that that fact is virtually impossible for “ordinary” people to discover.

Because of ineffectiveness associated with both exhortation and the establishment of laws for controlling behavior, some have reached the conclusion that the only answer to the problem of mistreatment of the brother/neighbor is societal system change. Thus, some members of the Tradition have advocated, and/or worked for, the creation of a New Society.

### C. Societal System Change as Means

A desire for a better societal situation has long been with us, and one can argue that the intention of the prophets, those who composed the Law, Jesus, etc., was to move the society of their time in such a direction. In addition, I find it of considerable interest that the Old Testament contains a few brief (“utopian”) “visions” of the Good Society. In [Isaiah 65:21 – 22](#), for example, we find this

They will build houses and dwell in them;  
they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit.  
<sup>22</sup> No longer will they build houses and others live in them,  
or plant and others eat.  
For as the days of a tree,  
so will be the days of my people;  
my chosen ones will long enjoy  
the work of their hands.

For an agricultural people being exploited, one’s dream is simple: Let me alone!  
A similar sentiment is expressed in this passage from [Jeremiah 31:4 – 5](#):

I will build you up again,  
and you, Virgin Israel, will be rebuilt.  
Again you will take up your timbrels  
and go out to dance with the joyful.  
<sup>5</sup> Again you will plant vineyards  
on the hills of Samaria;  
the farmers will plant them  
and enjoy their fruit.

Interestingly, societal system change as a means for achieving proper treatment of the brother or neighbor is an idea that developed primarily *beyond* Bible times and in the *West* rather than in Palestine. Perhaps it is for these reasons that people raised in Christianity find it difficult to understand that the Tradition, as expressed in the Bible, didn't *stop* with Bible times but developed elsewhere, and with a different focus. As this section is already too long, I will simply mention here that there is a long [“utopian” tradition](#) going back at least to [Plato](#) and [Thomas More](#) (who coined the term “utopia”), summarized at length in Frank E. and Fritzie P. Manuel's massive [Utopian Thought in the Western World](#) (1979).

Related to this tradition, there have been individuals who have not only *developed* new-society ideas, but made—and/or inspired—efforts to *implement* those ideas. Three names that come to mind here especially are those of [Robert Owen](#), [Charles Fourier](#), and [Claud Henri, comte de Saint-Simon](#). More recently, there is [B. F. Skinner](#), whose [Walden Two](#) (1948) inspired the creation of the [Twin Oaks](#) community. In addition, the “[garden city](#)” movement associated with [Ebenezer Howard](#) is worthy of mention (given that I am a *resident* of one, Greendale, Wisconsin!).

Although numerous works have been written on what characteristics a New Society should have, little thought has been given to “how to get there.” Early communarians such as Robert Owen tended to believe that by building a single “ideal” community, others would recognize life in that community as highly desirable, and would then *copy* that idea—this copying process resulting, eventually, in a complete transformation of the society.<sup>12</sup> I, however, recognized this “strategy” as inadequate some time ago, and in 1984 published a [5-“wave” strategy/scenario](#) of societal system change that featured *retirees* as the vanguard! Unfortunately, in that that strategy has not been implemented (yet!), it must *also* be regarded as “inadequate”!

### III. Have the Means Been *Effective*?

We are, then, forced to reach the dismal conclusion: **Despite the fact that several means have been suggested, some of them implemented to a degree, they have all *failed* to bring about a situation in which the “brother’s keeper” principle of the Tradition has been honored to an “adequate” degree!**

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<sup>12</sup> The [Hutterites](#) have used a “[grow-split](#)” strategy, but that strategy cannot be considered as one for societal conversion given that a given community is expected to grow not so much through the admission of new members as by *internal* growth—which, upon reaching a certain amount, results in a “splitting” of the community by forming a new one.

Given that various means have been tried, all without substantial success, it might seem that the Tradition should simply be abandoned! However, I for one am unwilling to do that, and therefore will continue with the second group of questions stated on p. 2 above.

#### IV. The *Origins* of the Tradition's Objective

At least three “theories” can be advanced as to the origin of the Tradition's objective, and some attention is given to each of them below.

##### A. God as Source

I stated earlier that I perceive the Tradition as traceable to the (Christian) Bible, its “Old Testament” portion in particular. As the quotations and summary statements in Section II indicate, the writers/redactors/compiler of the portions of the Hebrew Bible (i.e., the [Tanakh](#)) referred to in that section attributed their pronouncements, etc., to “God.” Although this seemingly suggests that monotheism existed as the dominant form of theological thinking in Palestine in the time of, e.g., the prophets, such was by no means case—as, e.g., Mark S. Smith's [The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts](#) (2003) demonstrates.

“God,” of course, is a *humanly-created concept*<sup>13</sup> which has been given a variety of meanings—not just a single clear one—with the Hebrew Bible itself containing at least 24 (!) different concepts of God—a point argued in [Jack Miles's God: A Biography](#) (1996). The concept itself was likely created as an *explanatory* device—to provide an explanation for phenomena of Nature. Given that numerous phenomena constitute Nature (e.g., thunder and lightning, the flooding of streams, etc.), it is unsurprising that *several gods* were created initially, and that only later did the idea of a single God—monotheism—emerge.

Why monotheism emerged is a question of little concern here, although one might argue that (a) it first emerged in desert areas (where just *one* environmental element is dominant, the sun); (b) it emerged (or at least received further development under monarchic conditions), where a single God was postulated as a counterpose to the king (i.e., a Being who was in *opposition* to the king, on the basis of the king's *actions*), but *superior* to any earthly king, in being supernatural;<sup>14</sup> etc.

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<sup>13</sup> Note that in saying “humanly-created” I am not *thereby* saying “[created out of thin air](#).” Put another way, “God” has a referent, but *what* that referent might be is not evident.

<sup>14</sup> The “[Kingdom of God](#)” concept presumably has its basis in the idea of God as a king-like being who is, however, superior to any earthly king in being supernatural.

Given that a diversity of gods were conceived during the time when the prophets, e.g., were making their pronouncements, it is not clear which of these Gods, having what specific characteristics, was “believed in” by these individuals. It’s possible, even, that *different* prophets “claimed” *different* Gods, that fact having been obscured by later editing efforts.

As to *why* the prophets attributed (so the books in their names claim, at any rate) their pronouncements to a God, this may have been because they supposedly (a) “heard voices” (as [Julian Jaynes](#) argued in his *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*, 1996); (b) were *conscious* of what they were saying, and attributed what they were saying to God for *self-protection* (!); or (c) some natural, but unidentifiable, force was responsible for “telling” them what to say, etc.; we will never know for certain what the source of their pronouncements was—although two further “theories” will be discussed shortly.

What *is* clear, however, regarding the concept of God associated with their pronouncements (as presented in “their” books) is that they perceived God as some sort of entity “out there” who (“who” being preferable to “that” here, in that this “something” seemed to have been personified) had *revealed* messages to them. *What* this God revealed, primarily, was (a) *commands*, and (b) “*revelations*” as to what was likely to occur if those commands were not followed. Note that *their* concept of God was rather different from the one prevailing today in that the prophets did not have the audacity to *petition* their God for favors (via prayers, e.g.); for them, God was only to be *listened to* for what God had to “say.”<sup>15</sup>

## B. The Nomadic Experience

If the Hebrew Bible gives a *theological* answer to the question posed by this section, scholars—except for those with confessional ties—have tended to discount such an explanation in favor of “secular” ones. One of the first scholars to do so was sociologist Louis Wallis,<sup>16</sup> of whom it has been said (in a [1950 review](#) of his 1949 *The Bible and Modern Belief*):

During the last three decades, Louis Wallis has published a series of volumes (*Sociological Study of the Bible*, 1912; *God and the Social Process*, 1935; *The Bible is Human*, 1942) emphasizing one

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<sup>15</sup> What I find conceivable is that the idea that gods not only *did* things but also *willed* things originated with the use of [Urim and Thummim](#) for discerning a god’s will. Once the notion that gods *had* a will emerged, the stage was set for the emergence of the idea that gods “spoke” to people. Note that this is just a “theory” of mine!

<sup>16</sup> My introduction to Wallis came while attending a short course dealing with urban matters at The Ohio State University during the summer in 1971 (I believe). One of the speakers was a sociologist who made reference to Wallis, and whose discussion of Wallis was so enthusiastic that I was led to read four of Wallis’s books.

fundamental thesis—that the struggle of the Hebrew prophets against Canaanite religion in Israel was essentially social and economic in character, though expressed in religious terms. They fought to preserve in Palestine the old social ideals of nomadic society, mutual responsibility, a rough egalitarianism, and the communal ownership of property, all of which found their religious sanction in the worship of JHVH. Against these standards stood the individualistic and competitive economy of agricultural and urban society which expressed itself in the Baal worship (*Ba'al*= “master, owner”).

This theme was developed more fully by orientalist Morris S. Seale, but in a different direction than that blazed by Wallis. Before commenting on Seale’s contribution, however, it would be well to clarify the meaning of “nomadism.” Non-sedentary peoples can be placed into two categories, those whose subsistence is based on gathering, scavenging, snaring, trapping, and hunting—commonly referred to as “hunter-gatherers”; and those whose subsistence is based on the herding of animals (camels, cattle, sheep, etc.). The gatherer-hunter (with “gatherer” placed first, in recognition of its primacy in obtaining food—by females, usually!<sup>17</sup>) way of life is the oldest one associated with our ancestors, with nomadism (or “pastoral nomadism”) being a much later development—not occurring until the domestication of animals had been accomplished.

It [has been said](#) of “nomadic pastoralism”—what I would simply refer to as “nomadism”—that:

Nomadic pastoralism seems to have developed as a part of the [secondary products revolution](#) proposed by [Andrew Sherratt](#), in which early [pre-pottery Neolithic](#) cultures that had used animals as live meat (“on the hoof”) also began using animals for their secondary products, for example, [milk](#) and its associated [dairy products](#), [wool](#) and other animal hair, hides and consequently [leather](#), [manure](#) for [fuel](#) and [fertilizer](#), and traction.

As the [secondary products revolution](#) “involved a widespread and broadly contemporaneous set of innovations in [Old World farming](#),” it’s clear that nomadism arose some time during, or shortly after, the “[Agricultural Revolution](#).” Given that fact, it’s likely that nomadism was initiated by individuals living in settled, agriculture-based societies (rather than by gatherer-hunters) who had access to domesticated animals, and who had also perhaps gained some knowledge of how to go about domesticating animals. *Why* did they leave their settled existence? Perhaps (a) a desire for a more adventurous way of life, perhaps (b) they had committed infractions and rather than await punishment decided to flee to the wilderness, or perhaps (c) they were ostracized for one reason or another (thus forced to leave), etc. Regardless of the “why” of nomadism, it *did* develop, and apparently was an outgrowth of “civilized” (i.e., agriculture-based, sedentary, even “urban”) existence.

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<sup>17</sup> I am following the practice of [Steven M. Stanley](#) here.



Morris S. Seale's contribution relative to nomadism is contained in his [\*The Desert Bible: Nomadic Tribal Culture and Old Testament Interpretation\*](#) (1974).<sup>18</sup> He stated the purpose of his book early on (p. 4):

It is the central thesis of this book that the Hebrews began as a nomadic people; that their life and literature continued, long after being settled, to reflect their origins; and that the Old Testament can be best understood in the light of their nomadic tribal culture. In my belief, it is the failure to see the Hebrews as they really were, astonishing as this may seem, which lies at the root of our trouble in translating and interpreting the [allegedly] inspired writings.

The central points in Seale's book can be summarized under three headings:

- Many of the words/statements that occur in the Old Testament reflect nomadic ideals and everyday life.
- Numerous parallels exist between those words/statements in the Old Testament and Arabic literature prior to the arrival of [Muhammad](#).
- Numerous errors exist in existing translations of the Old Testament (and Tanakh) because of translators' failure to understand ancient nomadic life.

Unfortunately, Seale's claim that the Hebrews were initially nomads is dismissed by most scholars today. Consider this by [Prof. Ze'ev Herzog](#), of Tel Aviv University:

*from Ha'aretz Magazine, Friday, October 29, 1999)*

*Following 70 years of intensive excavations in the Land of Israel, archaeologists have found out: The patriarchs' acts are legendary stories, we did not sojourn in Egypt or make an exodus, we did not conquer the land. Neither is there any mention of the empire of David and Solomon. Those who take an interest have known these facts for years, but Israel is a stubborn people and doesn't want to hear about it*

This is what archaeologists have learned from their excavations in the Land of Israel: the Israelites were never in Egypt, did not wander in the desert, did not conquer the land in a military campaign and did not pass it on to the 12 tribes of Israel. Perhaps even harder to swallow is that the united monarchy of David and Solomon, which is described by the Bible as a regional power, was at most a small tribal kingdom. And it will come as an unpleasant shock to many that the God of Israel, YHWH, had a female consort and that the early Israelite religion adopted monotheism only in the waning period of the monarchy and not at Mount Sinai.

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<sup>18</sup> James Barr, one of the scholars cited by Seale in his book, gave the book a rather [mean-spirited review](#)—one that strikes me as reeking of "[sour grapes](#)."



Also, Prof. Ralph Klein of the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago [has said](#) of the Biblical claims as to the early history of the Hebrews, “Unfortunately, there is not a shred of evidence outside the bible to corroborate these claims.” He went on:

The consensus holds that prior to the Hebrew monarchy, Israel was bound together in a confederation of Semitic tribes. This political arrangement supposedly evolved over several centuries from associations of Semite-speaking groups of pastoral nomads. Scholars also believe that before Israel became a power in Canaan at least some portion of the Hebrew population (if not all) journeyed into Egypt and lived there under hostile circumstances. Additionally, historians accept that the crucial stages occurred in the twelfth or eleventh century BC, when hundreds of new settlements were founded in the hill country of central Canaan (although there is no specific evidence connecting any of these settlements to Israel.) But certain questions persist.

What’s interesting about this statement is that although Klein admits that there is no *outside* evidence in support of the stories in the Old Testament, he suggests that the *stories themselves* may have some historical basis in that many scholars believe that the ancient Hebrews emerged from associated nomadic groups, thereby contradicting what Herzog had claimed. Thus, although Seale was likely wrong in taking the stories in the Old Testament at their face value (as historical accounts), he *may* have been correct in asserting that the ancient Hebrews (or their predecessors, at least) had been nomads.<sup>19</sup> Certainly the fact that Seale has found an abundance of nomadic material in the Old Testament supports that position—for how else would one

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<sup>19</sup> Thomas L. Thompson has stated: “By the end of the fourth millennium BCE, migrant herders were a significant part of the population of the South Levant.” *Op. cit.*, p. 117. As to what the “Levant” [has been and is](#), “**Levant** (/ləˈvænt/, **Arabic**: تاريخ سورية أو الشام *al-Shaam or Historical Syria*; **Hebrew**: קְנָאן *Kəná’an*; **Persian**: شام *Shumm*), also known as the **Eastern Mediterranean**, is a geographic and cultural region consisting of the “eastern Mediterranean **littoral** between **Anatolia** and **Egypt**”.<sup>[2]</sup> The Levant today consists of **Cyprus**, **Lebanon**, **Syria**, **Palestine**, **Jordan**, **Israel**, and part of southern **Turkey** (the former **Aleppo Vilayet**).

Also, there are [these statements](#) about nomads and nomadism: “The first nomadic pastoral society developed in the period from 8,500–6,500 BC in the area of the southern **Levant**. There, during a period of increasing aridity, **PPNB** cultures in the Sinai were replaced by a nomadic, pastoral pottery-using culture, which seems to have been a cultural fusion between a newly arrived **Mesolithic** people from Egypt (the **Harifian** culture), adopting their nomadic hunting lifestyle to the raising of stock.”<sup>[5]</sup>

This lifestyle quickly developed into what Jaris Yurins has called the circum-**Arabian** nomadic pastoral techno-complex and is possibly associated with the appearance of **Semitic languages** in the region of the **Ancient Near East**. The rapid spread of such nomadic pastoralism was typical of such later developments as of the **Yamnaya** culture of the **horse and cattle nomads of the Eurasian steppe**, or of the **Mongol** spread of the later **Middle Ages**.<sup>[5]</sup>

explain its presence there, given that that collection of books did not take final form much later, and under very different circumstances?

I am, however, deviating from the main concern of this section—“theories” as to the origin of the Tradition—and so must now get “back on track.” The question of relevance here is whether the Tradition can be traced back to *ancient nomads*—those living in Palestine in particular—with the *basis* of the Tradition being the *way of the life* developed by these peoples, and specifically the *value system* engendered by that way of life. The real question here, of course, was whether a “brother’s—or brothers’—keeper” or “love the neighbor” philosophy dominated the thinking and actions of the ancient nomads who lived in Palestine. And although Seale himself does not provide an answer to this question—for his interests are elsewhere—he *does* provide evidence relative to that question.

Although Louis Wallis had suggested that the ancient Hebrews, as nomads, valued “mutual responsibility, a rough egalitarianism, and the communal ownership of property,” which facts would seem to suggest that the ancient Hebrew nomads *were* “Traditionists,” Seale’s comments give one a different perspective on these “facts.” Although Seale did not *deny* that the ancient nomads possessed the traits identified by Wallis, Seale went on to identify *other* traits of a less “Traditionist” nature. Traits, in fact, that might lead one to conclude that, at best, the ancient Hebrew (and other) nomads were (*almost* like modern Christians!) *tangential* Traditionists at best, and, at worst, not Traditionists at all!

Seale noted, for example, that the ancient nomads seemed obsessed with how they were perceived by others; they craved prestige, to be thought of well by their fellow tribe members. If, for example, one were offended, one would treat this as not a mere slight, for one had one’s honor to maintain. Thus, one might challenge the other to a fight (the story of [Goliath and David](#) being an example). If the offending party was from a different tribe, because of the loyalty one has for one’s tribe, *all* able-bodied members of one’s tribe might attack the other tribe, the fight lasting less than a day. In other words, Seale attributed *bellicosity* with the ancient nomads.

In fighting, one was expected to demonstrate courage and prowess, and dying in battle was the preferred way to die—because of being honorable. In addition, nomads often engaged in looting raids, with women of the other tribe being the prized “catch.” If one did well in battle, and in one’s looting “operations,” one was likely to *boast* about it.

Nomads were often known for being generous, hospitable—but only because being so increased their *prestige* in the eyes of others in their tribe. Although the characteristic of being generous might be deemed praiseworthy, what must be kept in mind that displays of generosity, although helpful to those in need, were engaged in, apparently, not so much for *that* purpose but, rather, to add to the prestige of the giver. Empathy, then, was evidently *not* a notable trait of the ancient nomads!

Shall we then consider the early Hebrew nomads as the creators of the Tradition? My view is that given that evolution occurs not only at the *biological* level, but the *social* level as well, that the features of nomadic life that especially interested Louis Wallis—the facts that they valued “mutual responsibility, a rough egalitarianism, and the communal ownership of property”—were enough to qualify them as the *initiators* of the Tradition. That is, the *roots* of the Tradition can, I believe, be traced back to the ancient nomads, and what the Hebrew prophets then did was to *expand* those positive qualities—at the expense of the various negative ones, such as extolling humility over pride—to give us a Tradition having only positive characteristics.

### C. The Discrepancy

A third “theory” goes still farther back in time and is of a more “fundamental” nature. It is based on the view that as humans were evolving biologically (in response to environmental change, predation, and female-choice sexual selection—but *not* Darwinian “natural selection”!) their way of life (based on “[foraging](#)”) was also changing. A co-development occurred between the two, in that the way of life itself affected how evolution occurred, and that as biological evolution occurred—and brain size increased—those changes precipitated changes in way of life.

With the Agricultural Revolution of around 10,000 years ago, however, ways of life began to change (relatively) rapidly, but human biology, because it tends to change much more slowly, tended to remain as it had been. Because humans had developed what might be termed “design specifications” during their evolution (see pp. 38–118 in [my eBook](#)), and the new ways of life that were developing provided stimuli and behaviors that were discordant with reference to those design specifications, a Discrepancy was developing between (a) the way of life that people lived and (b) the way of life for which their bodies and brains had become “designed.” The way of life that developed prior to this Revolution can, therefore, be termed a “natural” way of life, and after that time the ways of life that have emerged have become increasingly “unnatural.”

As to how might characterize life prior to the Agricultural Revolution, one way to approximate such life is to study contemporary “primitives.” This is one task that anthropologists have set before themselves, and here are the comments of one anthropologist, [Colin M. Turnbull](#), regarding the “primitives” that he had studied:<sup>20</sup>

There are many who say that for the primitive, life was and is, in Hobbesian terms, nasty, brutish, and short. On the whole, anthropologists have found otherwise, and over the years

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<sup>20</sup> [The Human Cycle](#) (1983), pp. 21–22. Granted that the picture that Turnbull creates here may be somewhat overdrawn (as [Edmund Leach](#) argued [rather vigorously](#)), but surely the “primitives” (if we may generalize about them, recognizing that they varied in their characteristics) were (and *are*—insofar as there are still some who we have not yet killed!) far more “Traditional” than were the pastoral nomads who came into existence much later. For a more balanced (while being accessible) discussion of the “primitives” see Robin Clarke and Geoffrey Hindley’s [The Challenge of the Primitives](#) (1975).

have accumulated an enormous mass of data to support their view. This evidence is based on years of living within such societies, suffering the same deprivations, including sickness and, sometimes, premature death. If we measure a culture's worth by the longevity of its population, the sophistication of its technology, the material comforts it offers, then many primitive cultures have little to offer us, that is true. But . . . in terms of a conscious dedication to human relationships that are both affective and effective, the primitive is ahead of us all the way. He is working at it at every stage of his life, from infancy to death, while playing just as much as while praying; whether at work or at home his life is governed by his conscious quest for social order. Each individual learns this social consciousness as he grows up, and the lesson is constantly reinforced until the day he dies, and because of that social consciousness each individual is a person of worth and value and importance to society, also from the day of birth to the day of death.

The Discrepancy referred to above, and the new ways of life that were developing, provided, then, stimuli and behaviors that were discordant with reference to the design specifications that had developed over the centuries—so that a Discrepancy was developing between the way of life that people lived and the way of life for which their bodies and brains had become “designed.” Granted that people *are* adaptable. But as René Dubos has noted, “man can become adapted to almost anything, even to conditions that will inevitably destroy the very values that have given mankind its uniqueness.”<sup>21</sup> In confirmation of that fact, I would argue that so adapted are most people to their existing way of life *today* that virtually no one is interested in the possibility that global warming is on the verge of wiping out most, if not all, of the world's population! As a consequence, few, if any, will attempt to prepare for this possibility, the likely result being the (near) extinction of our species.

This Discrepancy is, in my opinion, the *ultimate* cause of virtually all of virtually *all* of the problems that humans have had since the days of the Agricultural Revolution. However, despite the fact that our *knowledge* of this Discrepancy depended on the development of evolutionary ideas (beginning in the 1800s), *prior* to that time some have *sensed* a Discrepancy and have acted to reduce, if not eliminate, it. I would put the ancient Hebrew prophets in this category (along with early utopians, etc.), and argue that although they *claimed* that their pronouncements came to them from “God,” in actuality it was the “promptings” of their human nature that were the source. I cannot prove this, but feel strongly that it has merit. The “theory” does, however, raise the question: What were the *unique circumstances* in Palestine that resulted in prophets arising there but not elsewhere (assuming, that is, that comparable individuals did not arise elsewhere)?

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<sup>21</sup> In [So Human An Animal](#), 1968, p. 94)

## V. A Change in the Tradition's *Objective*

The Tradition has been in existence for many centuries, but I have made no attempt herein to provide a *history* of the Tradition. Rather, my focus has been on the *objective* associated with the Tradition (which I have defined as being one's brother's keeper or as loving the neighbor), and *means* that have been suggested, and implemented (to some extent), for achieving that objective. I have noted that "operationalizing" that objective is not an easy matter, and that different individuals/groups are likely to operationalize it differently. One might perhaps add that some of those attempts have led to *deviant* developments (such as Christianity); what I would question about such attempts, however, is the degree of *honesty* involved with them—my conclusion being that their deviation from the Tradition was a result of what might be termed "false operationalization."

This might be an appropriate point to note that the Tradition could not have arisen *prior* to the Agricultural Revolution because no *need* for it existed until *after* that Revolution occurred!—a point implicit in my "Discrepancy" discussion in Section IV. The development of agriculture represented a *disruptive* force in human history, especially in that it resulted in a dichotomy between urban and rural dwellers, and exploiters and exploited. The latter is what *directly* caused the development of the Tradition. Given that exploiters and exploited are still with us—with inequality becoming [increasingly a problem](#), in fact!—one must conclude that the Tradition has been an abysmal failure up to this point in time!

Ironically, what may "save" the Tradition is the prospect of global warming wiping out most of the world's population within the next few decades, if not years. That is, those who engage in pre-adaptive behaviors—whether or not they are NeWFians—are those most likely to survive the ravages the global warming will be inflicting on us. NeWFians—and others as well, of course—must become aware of this threat, and must then engage in pre-adaptive efforts in an attempt to survive those ravages if there is to be any hope of "salvation." No guarantees exist for their success, but what *is* assured is that those who do *not* make such an effort are definitely *not* likely to survive.

NeWFians are not the only ones aware of this threat, of course, but most of those so aware seem to lack a "clue" as to what to do in response to this threat.<sup>22</sup> Because NeWFians, however, know that the answer—insofar as there *is* one!—lies with pre-adaptive efforts, they are the most likely to *engage* in such efforts—and thereby (possibly) survive. That would mean that the only (or at least main) survivors would be "Traditionists"—meaning, in turn, that the Tradition had finally

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<sup>22</sup> People at the Pentagon, for example, having imprisoned themselves in their own peculiar world, [exemplify this cluelessness](#).

been successful! Ironical, isn't it, that those "[left behind](#)"<sup>23</sup> (!) when global warming begins its "culling operation" of the human population, are far more likely to be NeWFians than "[fundamentalists](#)" (i.e., those who are fundamentally wrong about '[most everything](#)'), those fundamentalists who are "[dominionists](#)" in particular!

## VI. NeWFism as Part of the Tradition

In Section I I defined the Tradition in "objective" terms, that objective being stated simply as either being one's brother's "keeper" or as loving the neighbor—i.e., not merely harboring "warm and fuzzy" feelings for the neighbor, but being like the Good Samaritan in *doing* what's necessary to contribute to the well-being of the neighbor—so far as one's economic means, innate and acquired abilities, etc. allow. *Operationalizing* this objective can be done in a variety of ways, and a fundamental assumption of NeWFism is that such operationalization is best accomplished in a "community" setting—such as is provided by the NeWF as an institution.

In addition to this fundamental point, I would argue that the NeWF is not only a part of the Tradition in question, but is an institution that implicitly recognizes a tendency for traditions to stagnate, thereby becoming ever more "out of tune" with the then-current situation. As I noted earlier (in Section II), sociologist Edward A. Ross, over a century ago, recognized this point relative to *laws*, and proposed that laws be subject to continual update. *My* view relative to this is that an *institutional* approach to this problem could be more effective, which is why I have advocated the creation of NeWFs (i.e., New Word Fellowships). In the previous section, for example, I noted that until recently no significant threat to our species existed, but that within the past few decades global warming has begun to raise its ugly head. (I should add that the nuclear threat has been with us for several decades, but that is a sort of threat that we "ordinary" citizens can do little about; global warming, in contrast, *would* seem to call for *individual* actions, ones having *pre-adaptation* as their objective.)

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<sup>23</sup> According to a recent [news report](#), "Rep. Michele Bachmann (R-Minn.) believes that we're living in the End Times—and she claims to have proof. In an [interview Saturday with Jan Markell on the Christian radio program "Understanding the Times,"](#) Bachmann accused President Barack Obama of giving aid to terrorists. This, she says, is [solid evidence that we have entered the Last Days.](#)"

It is embarrassing to have to admit that one lives in the same country as this "[wingnut](#)," but the folks who live in Minnesota are responsible for her being in the House of Representatives. It goes without saying that although NeWFians and others (most notably climatologists) believe that global warming is an extremely serious matter, having the possibility of wiping out (most of) the world's population, they ground that belief in *science*, not in alleged "end times" predictions in the Christian Bible.



In that NeWFism has a *this-worldly orientation* it is also in the Tradition. Those associated with Christianity may find this point controversial, so used have many of them become to expecting a “return” of Jesus in the “near” future (a future that keeps getting pushed farther into the future!), with the expectation that Jesus will then take “his own” back with him to Heaven. However, as the discussion in Section II should make clear, the “heart” of the Bible’s message is being one’s brother’s keeper in the *here-and-now*; so that it is actually *Christianity* that is tangential relative to the Tradition!

Those who have been associated with Christianity have become used to thinking of “salvation” in *other-worldly* terms. The NeWFian may or may not believe that existence occurs in some form after death—no definitive evidence exists to support either view. The NeWFian *does*, however, believe that *while we are alive* we have an *obligation* to do what we can to contribute to the well-being of others in the here-and-now, and to be concerned with our “salvation” (from extinction) as a species. So concerned, in fact, that one commits oneself to (a) *thinking* seriously about how to respond to this threat, to (b) *planning* possible actions, and then (c) *acting* on those plans.

NeWFism provides participants with an opportunity not only to share ideas with others—including concerning what is occurring presently, and what can be anticipated—but an opportunity to make plans with others, and to act with others on those plans. The plans involved here might be for helping others in need, for addressing the problem of global warming, etc. For a variety of reasons, then, not only do I perceive NeWFism as a *part* of the Tradition, but as a vehicle for *extending, furthering* it.

A difference that some might cite between NeWFism and the Tradition is that a “holy book”—i.e., the (Christian) Bible—is associated with the Tradition, whereas NeWFism has nothing comparable—its orientation being to *verbal* exchanges rather than *written* texts. But is this a valid claim? It’s true that much of our *information* regarding the Tradition, in its early stages, comes from the Hebrew Bible. What must be kept in mind, however, is **that the early members of the Tradition had no Bible!—so that NeWFians are like them in that respect.**<sup>24</sup> In fact, **NeWFians (and Quakers as well) have a better basis for claiming that their religion is Bible-based than those who make an explicit claim to that effect!—because NeWFians strive to emulate the various *characters* in the Bible.**

Just as the prophets of the Bible looked to “revelations” for their pronouncements, so would NeWFians not be surprised if “revelations” occur to them as they participate in NeWF sessions.

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<sup>24</sup> Jesus and his brother James wrote nothing, but would have *heard* the existing Scripture being read. Paul wrote letters, but had one foot in the Tradition, the other foot in the [Greek “mysteries.”](#)

Indeed, NeWFians *expect* “revelations”—perhaps in the form of the “[paraclete](#)” promised by Jesus in John’s gospel (14:15 – 17; 14:26; 15:26; 16:7).

The Bible came into being not so much as a book providing (allegedly) historical accounts but, rather, as a document (*collection* of documents, actually) that would serve the interests of leaders of organizations that purported to be of a “religious” nature—leaders whose orientation to belief systems and rituals disqualified them for membership in the Tradition! **NeWFians have no more need of a Bible than did those who originated, and carried forward, the Tradition!** This is not to say that NeWFians are “know-nothings” who lack an interest in reading, searching the internet, etc. Rather, it is simply to say that NeWFians have no Bible—despite the fact that their knowledge of the Tradition itself (in its early stages, at least) comes from the (Christian) Bible!

## VII. Conclusions

While one is watching television, reading a newspaper or popular magazine, conversing with someone, etc., one is rarely, if ever, alerted to the fact that we are living during a unique period of human history—a time when our actions, of the recent past and present, may very well result in our demise as a species, as a result of the global warming that is occurring. Given the *general* lack of interest in this possibility, in conjunction with government’s lack of a meaningful response to it, individuals aware of this threat must engage in pre-adaptive activities if they are to have any hope of being “saved.”

Pre-adaptive activities can take the form of either becoming a homesteader or an eco-communitarian—with the latter option being the preferred one (because it would enable the continuation of some semblance of “civilization”).

NeWFism is herein proposed not only as a “good” in itself (for a variety of reasons given in my eBook), but as a vehicle for addressing the threat of global warming. In that as an institution it looks to God for guidance, it is “Traditionist.” More importantly, however, is the strong possibility that NeWFians will be among the few who survive the culling of the human population that global warming will be likely be inflicting on our species—is *already* so doing, in fact (along with numerous other species!

The fact that NeWFians look to God for guidance reminds me of this passage in Matthew’s gospel ([19:23 – 26](#)):

<sup>23</sup> Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven . <sup>24</sup> Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.”



<sup>25</sup> When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished [given their proverbial “cluelessness!"] and asked, “Who then can be saved?”

<sup>26</sup> Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

May this come true in the case of NeWFians and the threat posed to our continued existence as a species posed by global warming! Not that such a culling can be viewed by anyone with any sense of satisfaction. It appears, however, that a future massive culling is inevitable. (: